

MINUTES

First Quarterly Meeting of the MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION

Held, pursuant to notice

Wednesday, January 14, 2004 — 10:00 AM

Room 400, Harry S. Truman Office Building , Jefferson City, MO

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance

B. Roll Call

In attendance: **Chairman Emmett Fairfax, Vice Chairman Carson Ross, Member Donald Gralike, Member Bernadette Miller and Member Carl Niewoehner**

C. Introductions

Guests and staff present.

1. Guests: **Jim Whitfield**, Western Area Coordinator, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Gary Williams**, Director Regional Office Dept. of Veterans Affairs; **Larry Daniels**, Adjutant DAV, Dept of MO; **Stephen Gaither**, Public Affairs Office Columbia VA Hospital.; **Chief Raphael Wahwassuck**, Commander DAV, Dept. of MO; **Ernie Lee**, Chairman MAVO; **Lynn Dorrell**, Adjutant American Legion , Dept. of MO; **Charles Jackson**, Director, Dept. of Public Safety; **James Hughes**, Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force; **John Eckhoff**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Kathy Sturgeon**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Jon Schnieder**, Regional VSO Liaison; **Eloise Ross**, wife of Commissioner Carson Ross; **Michael Stokes**, State Treasurer DAV; **Everett Kelly**, National Service Officer, Military Order of Purple Heart; **Andrew Edwards**, DAV; **Dave Dambrosio**, DAV; **Dale Akeman**, Chapter 10 DAV, Independence; **Robert Wright**, DAV; **Larry Endecott**, DAV; **Wilburn Rowden**, American Ex POW; **James Patterson**, Amvets; **Gary Adams**, Amvets; **Jerry Hotop**, Amvets; **Bill Pettys**, MAVO; **Dale Wiseman**, Amvets; **Donald Mosley**, The Retired Enl. Assn; **Orville Wilke**, Post 313, American Legion; **Joseph Montgomery**, Chapter 49 DAV; **Bill Montgomery** Chapter 49 DAV; **Darrell Robertson**, NAAV; **David Wolf**, DAV; **Joe Sillman**, Chapter 49 DAV, **Paul Schuler**, Chapter 49, DAV; **David Combs**, Fleet Reserve Assn.; **Norman Combs**, Fleet Reserve Assn.; **Ron Adams**, VVA; **Gary Collins**, Vet Center St. Louis; **Jim Talbott**, District 17,VFW; **Bill Modglin**, VFW; **Jim Holmes**, VFW; **Glen Davis**, State Commander VFW; **Dewey Riehn**, VFW;

Will Dailey, Director, Myrl Billings Memorial Veterans Center, Springfield, MO; **Chris DeBold**, Myrl Billings Memorial Veterans Center, Springfield, MO; **Jim Mueller**, VFW; **Micheal Bounds**, St. Louis City Dept. of Human Services

2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director of Planning; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Tim Norton**, Director of Properties; **Anne Payne**, Superintendent of Homes; **Jerilyn Cornelius**, Administrative Assistant STV; **Christina Acree**, Director Information Systems; **Jerry Quigley**, Director Jacksonville Cemetery; **Ken Swearengin**, Director Bloomfield Cemetery; **Mike Robbins**, Director Springfield Cemetery; **Stan Smith**, Administrator Warrensburg Veterans Home

- D. Approval of November 17, 2003 Commission Meeting Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded. Commissioner Ross made a motion to accept the minutes and Commissioner Miller seconded the motion.

II. OLD BUSINESS:

Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

Budget – Ron Taylor advised budget process is ongoing and we do not have all the Governor's recommendations in yet. What has been turned in looks promising with the continuation of the Veterans Benefits Awareness Program and some additional staff to make sure the homes are adequately staffed to meet the needs without excessive overtime. Mandatory overtime leads to dissatisfaction which increases staff turnover. The Commission is hopeful the new years budget, at least with the Governor's recommendations, will solve some of these problems.

Swan Lake Cemetery – Attorney Generals office continues to report that Swan Lake Cemetery in Kansas City is still pending per the investigation. Mr. Taylor suggested that the Commissioners may want to request a meeting with the Attorney Generals office regarding this matter. Commissioner Ross encourages all veterans and service organizations to write pressuring the Attorney General to look into Swan Lake. Chairman Fairfax noted information was submitted to the Commission approximately one year ago concerning this matter. Commissioner Ross made a motion to have Ron Taylor arrange a meeting with the Attorney Generals office and request them to fully investigate this situation. Commissioner Miller seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Anne Payne, Superintendent of Homes

Homes Program – Census/Waiting List Statistics Report which includes information about MVCs average daily census for November totaling 1,056 veterans being served in our Missouri Veterans Homes. The report also shows a waiting list of over 1,200 people who would like to be provided service through our veterans homes system.

Two current construction projects ongoing are the replacement facility of 200 bed in Mt. Vernon and the 100 bed dementia unit in St. Louis in addition to the current 200 beds. In order for MVC to occupy the new buildings after construction is complete there is a process with the federal VA where they visit and conduct a recognition survey. This survey is done in order to meet regulatory compliance with all the rules that are necessary for MVC to be eligible to receive the federal per diem. Ms. Payne stated they are hoping to have those surveys scheduled later this spring.

(Hand out) A letter of appreciation for MVCs support from the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veteran Affairs in California was received. The Homes Program was contacted to assist with providing a copy of the homes manual, handbooks and policies and procedures to the state of California for their use as a model for their agency.

Ms. Payne serves as the Chief Negotiator for MVC on Labor Relations Activities. She reported the 3rd tentative agreement with the Craft and Maintenance has been completed and will now go for a vote. Things are going really well and the are maintaining good operational business practices in this partnership.

Ms. Payne thanked all the people for the volunteer support and monetary donations provided to the Homes program. Tremendous hours are donated across the state from volunteers and service organizations providing direct support for either the operations or to the veterans themselves. Monetary donations to date from July to November indicate over \$237,000 has been donated which assists with the purchase of special equipment (lift vans) and items for the property which include gazebos and fencing that enhances the quality of life for our veterans. Commissioner Ross asked if the MVC acknowledges receipt of these donations. Ms. Payne indicated each home has a mechanism in place for acknowledging these contributions which include letters, recognition in the facilities newsletters and a Volunteers Banquet once a year recognizing the volunteers. Commissioner Gralike noted the previous minutes in November indicated the residents would be moving after December 19 into the new dementia wing at St. Louis. His concerns are if this process is being held up by the federal VA. Ms. Payne advised that construction has to be completed prior to the VA inspections. After successful completing of the survey from VA the residents may then be moved, due to construction delays this has not been done yet. She indicated they are expecting the survey might occur in February. Commissioner

Gralike addressed shortage of staffing concerns at the St. Louis Home. Anne Payne indicated rate has increased on the LPN class and therefore the homes have been able to fill a number of those positions. She stated at the moment a lot of the positions have been filled in St. Louis and they have already started hiring staff for the additional 100 bed unit. The staff can be oriented and trained by the time the move takes place. There are subsequent phases of construction after we make that move the 100 bed unit with the existing 50 and we will keep 50 beds open for those phases of construction for a few months while they do rehab on the facility's older part of the building. After much discussion Commissioner Gralike requested the Commission to prepare a report showing the numbers of the waiting list and at what level of care for the next meeting. Ron Taylor noted that according to VA criteria the state of Missouri has all the nursing beds that VA authorizes. Mr. Taylor also stated that we have been able to hire recently staff and we are in the process of hiring people so we can fill the 250 beds. These positions have been included in the budget request. The current budget request has been approved for us to maintain current staff and adds some additional direct care staff. He noted that we do not have recommendations yet on some of the pay issues. The previous two years without pay raises makes it hard for MVC to compete with the private facilities. Commission Niewoehner noted his concerns regarding staffing. Chairman Fairfax requested a report at the next Commission concerning the St. Louis Veterans Home.

Mr. Taylor advised the Commissioners that the VA recognition survey done three years ago at the Warrensburg Veterans Home per diem issues is still pending per the problem noted on the survey with vision panels on the doors. The same doors were installed at Cameron although VA did not recognize on survey. Both facility doors were changed at a later date. MVC filed an appeal with VA and a formal hearing is scheduled for March 22. The Attorney General's office is representing the Commission.

Construction Update: Tim Norton, Director of Properties

Construction – (Hand out) Tim Norton reported to the Commission the St. Louis Veterans Home was scheduled for recognition inspection for January 12, 2004, per the request of VA the meeting was cancelled and rescheduled for February 3. Mr. Norton informed that a break in the sprinkler line in the new wing broke causing water damage to the ceiling and walls in two locations. When the contractor tested the lines water was left in the pipe which caused the pipe to freeze and burst. Repairs are in process. He also noted that adding the new 100 bed wing in St. Louis will make it a 300 bed facility. Once inspection is complete 50 residents will be moved into the new 100 bed unit once settled in and staffing in place then they will start filling the next 50 beds. The additional 50 beds from the existing facility will be kept open in order for Phase II of the construction project to be completed which will take approximately 6 months.

Mt. Vernon – The Dedication Ceremony is tentatively planned for March 19.

Ft. Leonard Wood Cemetery – 50 soil borings have been completed and preliminary reports indicate that there will be 40 to 50 acres of land that is suitable for burials. Some areas indicate 5 to 7 feet of rock but would be appropriate to do single burials and cremations in those locations. The initial report looks like the site will be fine. Once the testing is complete a grant application will be sent.

Issues about the Warrensburg Veterans Home therapy pool have been addressed. The manufacturer and company who installed the pool visited the site this week and replaced the heater and filter. The pool is running now and testing is required for 3 to 4 days before residents can use it.

Inquiries about road signage at the Warrensburg Home was discussed at the last commission meeting. MODOT was notified and have acknowledged that construction of the signs should be complete and have signs in place on Rt. 13 and Rt. 50 within the next 6 weeks.

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

Service to Veterans – Sharon Keith reported the Service to Veterans Program has formed a Service to Veterans Executive Committee (STVEC) that will meet to discuss issues concerning the STV Program and officers. Members consist of the 5 region supervisors and the Director of the STV program.

Ms. Keith reported the STV Program is involved in raising benefits awareness. In addition to attending the Veterans Benefits Supermarkets they have also participated in local parades in several regions and have been involved in radio talk shows sharing veteran benefits information.

Cemeteries Update: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

Cemetery Program – (Hand out) Jess Rasmussen reported a combined total of 1,913 burials have been performed at the four cemeteries and 7,668 pre-registrations completed.

Mr. Rasmussen reported Washington has had difficult time in establishing contracts for niche covers. The two new cemeteries have experienced some problems and Washington has advised a contract should be in place soon.

Commissioner Ross thanked the staff at Higginsville Cemetery, Col. Medley, Western Area Military Funeral Honors Team, and Commission staff who attended and helped make his brothers burial service beautiful in November. His stated

concerns on the openings of the committal shelter in cold weather. Mr. Rasmussen announced that installation of retractable doors is being evaluated. Chairman Fairfax requested this matter be looked into to.

VSO Grants: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

VSO Grant Program- Ron Taylor thanked the service organizations in assisting with outreach efforts and explained the VSO Grant Program and how the funds are used by the service organizations to assist in promoting Veterans benefits awareness. He noted this is the first year that the full \$750,000 has been awarded. Several organizations have contacted the Commission and would like to be considered next year. The assistance they provide through this grant is shown in the increase in pension/compensation dollars for Missouri.

Veterans Benefits Awareness Program: Ralph Durnbaugh, Director

VBATF – (Hand out) Ralph Durnbaugh updated the Commission on the Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force. Charts were distributed showing the monthly summary of MVC calls to the toll free number. Over 5,300 calls have been received to date.

Benefits Supermarkets – To date 15 Veterans Benefits Supermarkets have been held across the state and have served over 3,400 veterans and their dependents. The Supermarkets along with other efforts in raising veterans benefits awareness has shown an increase for Missouri this year from last year of 54 million dollars. Mr. Durnbaugh stated the service organizations and volunteers help make this a success. VA expenditures for 2003 indicate that Missouri still has a challenge in a few areas to include the metro areas. Differences show that Veterans in St. Louis City, St. Louis County and Jackson County receive \$350 less per month than remainder of state.

Phase II of the VBATF strategy will be to continue conducting the Supermarkets in the target areas as well as getting community involvement in conducting their own Supermarkets with less direct support from the Commission.

Commissioner Ross informed Mr. Durnbaugh that he would be happy to assist getting leaders in the metro areas.

Mr. Taylor advised that included in the Governor's recs one FTE has been designated to promote VBA in the Kansas City/St. Louis area.

Mr. Taylor announced to the Commissioners the retirement of Ralph Durnbaugh effective May 1, 2004. Mr. Durnbaugh was commended for his hard work.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

Budget Issues - Ron Taylor advised that some of the Governor's recs does include an increase for MVC noting E&E, 1FTE for STV Program, core for the

Cemetery Program and some additional personnel as well as additional money for the pharmacy increase for next year. Pay issues continue to be discussed.

Chairman Fairfax presented Commissioner Niewoehner a plaque in appreciation for his commitment and leadership as Chairman of the Commission from June 2000 to November 2003.

Charles Jackson, Director Department of Public Safety thanked the Commissioners for what they are undertaking. He stated he appreciates what MVC is doing for Missouri's veterans. Mr. Jackson recently visited the Warrensburg Veterans Home. Mr. Jackson advised as he continues to travel across the state he is encouraging veterans to seek their veterans benefits. He invites the service organizations to speak with him anytime regarding veterans issues. He also offered the availability of the Armories for Supermarkets and is working with General Shull on getting veterans involved with activities going on with the Missouri National Guard.

Michael Bounds, Veterans Affairs Manager, St. Louis City Human Services, reported they hosted it 2nd Annual Homeless Veterans Thanksgiving Dinner on November 22. He thanked all those who volunteered and presented a plaque to Hal Dulle from the Commission and Gary Collins from the St. Louis Vet Center.

Gary Williams, Dept. of Veterans Affairs, St. Louis Regional Office notified the Commission of recent staff changes. Assistant Director Jerry Lorang left and has been replaced by David Underwagner from Kentucky ,and Brad Pendelton, Veterans Service Center Manager retired in June and has been replaced by David Leonard from Washington, D.C. The St. Louis Regional office will continue the process they are making in delivering veterans benefits. He shared information that VA data shows the number of veterans and widows receiving benefits in the state of Missouri from December 2002 to December 2003 indicates a net increase of 1,938 beneficiaries.

Jon Schneider, Dept. of Veterans Affairs Regional VSO Liaison commented he would try to adjust Warrensburg Veterans Home per diem issue.

Col. Wayne Medley, Director Missouri Military Funeral Honors Program reported for 2003 over 8,000 services were conducted and December broke record month totals of 703 to 841, an increase of 138.

Three new Honors Teams locations are in final stages of completion: Warrensburg Armory, West Plains and St. Joseph.

Commissioner Ross added that the Funeral Honors Team does a beautiful job speaking from personal experience and he is impressed with the ceremonial bugler.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Fairfax announced the next Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 27 from 10:00- 12:00 at Missouri Veterans Commission Headquarters.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald L. Taylor", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary